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News Release

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Ada County Traveler Is First Idahoan to Contract West Nile Virus

A 47-year-old Ada county man has been diagnosed with West Nile virus, although health officials believe he contracted the disease while traveling on a recent trip to the East Coast. This is the first suspected case of the disease in the Idaho.

The man is recovering well from the infection and poses no health threat to other Idaho residents. West Nile virus is not spread from one person to another, but only by mosquitoes infected with the virus.

Health officials from the Central District Health Department and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare believe the man contracted the disease while on a trip to the East Coast. He developed a headache, muscle pain, and weakness accompanied by dizziness. He was not hospitalized. Blood samples were tested by Health and Welfare's Bureau of Laboratories and sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The presumptive tests from both labs indicate the man had contracted West Nile virus. Final testing by the CDC will take approximately one week to complete.

"We advise all Idahoans—including those traveling outside the state-- to protect themselves from being bitten by mosquitoes," says Dr. Christine Hahn, Idaho State Epidemiologist. "These precautions are

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especially important for people over the age of 50 or people with underlying medical conditions. Travelers should be aware that West Nile virus has spread to all states east of the Rockies.”

Hahn advises people traveling to affected states to:

- Avoid outdoor activities at dawn and dusk, when mosquitoes are most active and feeding;
- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts outdoors; and
- Protect yourself with mosquito repellent containing DEET, applying it according to manufacturers’ instructions. Parents are advised not to apply repellent that contains more than 10 percent DEET on their children.

Approximately 20 percent of people who are infected with West Nile virus have symptoms of the infection, which can include headaches, body aches and mild fever. Less than one percent of people infected develop a serious illness from the viral infection, such as encephalitis or meningitis. So far this year, West Nile virus is responsible for 43 deaths in the United States. Anyone who believes they may have contracted West Nile virus should contact their physician.

West Nile virus has been found in 41 states. Even though Idaho has not yet found the virus in mosquito or bird populations, Hahn advises homeowners to begin insect-proofing their homes now. “It is only a matter of time before West Nile arrives in Idaho,” she says. “People can be fixing torn screens in their homes, or cleaning their yards of tires or things that collect standing water that provides breeding grounds for mosquitoes.”

Although there is no vaccine for people, an equine vaccine has been developed. Hahn recommends horse owners contact their veterinarians now about vaccinating their animals. “Many horse owners in other states waited until West Nile virus was in their areas before calling about vaccination,” she says. “But it takes five weeks for the vaccine to be effective after the initial vaccination, so not everyone’s animal was protected.”

Idaho is currently surveying mosquito populations for the virus, and testing dead magpies, crows, ravens

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and jays submitted through the District Health Departments. West Nile virus has a high mortality rate among these birds, and most states have discovered the virus through dead bird testing. People should contact their District Health Departments about possible testing if they discover dead birds.

For more information about the West Nile virus, please visit the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's West Nile virus web site at: http://www2.state.id.us/dhw/cdp/westnile/west_nile_index.htm.

or Central District Health Department's West Nile website at:
<http://www.cdhd.org/CommunicableDisease/diseases/westnile.asp>

Additional information can also be found on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm>

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(Editors: For more information about West Nile Virus, please contact Public Information Officer Tom Shanahan at 334-0668.)